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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: BALKANS REGIONAL REFUGEE COORDINATOR REPORT OF
WEEKLY ACTIVITIES - JAN. 29, 2009

SUMMARY

1.(SBU) BALKANS REGIONAL REFUGEE COORDINATOR REPORT OF WEEKLY
ACTIVITIES - JAN. 29, 2009

- * Serbian Government Crunching Numbers for Regional
Refugee Conference
- * Afghan Asylum Seekers in Macedonia Face Deportation
to Greece
- * UNHCR Update on Displaced Persons from Kosovo -
Politics Still Hinder Returns
- * Media in Serbia
- * Comings and Goings

End Summary.

SERBIAN GOVERNMENT CRUNCHING NUMBERS FOR REFUGEE REGIONAL
CONFERENCE

2.(SBU): Following the Jan. 15 preparatory meeting in Zagreb, the
Serbian Commissariat for Refugees (SCR) is comparing data with
Ministry of Interior and UNHCR to develop the most up-to-date lists
of refugees and others who fled Croatia and Bosnia and are still
need of durable solutions. Commissioner Cucic told Refcoord that
he is confident that Serbia will provide all information requested.
In order to complete this exercise, he has sent a letter to the
Government of Croatia (GoC) requesting detailed information on the
GoC's records on returns and assistance rendered to those who
returned from Serbia. Cucic is hopeful that his counterpart in
GoC's Directorate for the Administration of the Areas of Special
State Concern will accept his request to meet soon. Cucic said,
"We are happy to meet wherever they like--here in Serbia or in
Croatia. UNHCR Serbia Rep Eduardo Arboleda independently
confirmed GoS' efforts. He and his staff met last week with the
SCR. A follow up meeting will take place next week.

AFGHAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN MACEDONIA FACE DEPORTATION TO GREECE

3.(SBU)On Jan. 22 UNCHR Macedonia Representative Carlos Maldonado contacted Embassy Skopje regarding three Afghans--3 males, one of whom is 17 year old--who entered Macedonia illegally and face imminent deportation to Greece, their point of entry. Maldonado believes that the Macedonian Ministry of Interior's Section of Asylum did not properly handle these asylum cases because the three were not initially given legal assistance, were not provided with translators, were asked to sign the rejection of the application without lawyers or interpretation, and because the cases were accelerated--specifically prohibited for minors by Macedonian law. UNHCR did not learn of the three until late December/early January though they entered in September. Macedonia sent two requests to Greece for the migrants' readmission, which Greece accepted, the first such acceptance, according to Maldonado. He is concerned that, without assurances from Greece that the asylum seekers will have access to proper procedures, these asylum seekers would be sent from Greece to Turkey and then returned to Afghanistan.

4.(SBU)Maldonado fears that there will be more such cases. He pointed out that last month UNHCR issued an updated advisory on Greece as an asylum country, essentially advising countries to not return asylum seekers to Greece in operation of the Dublin Convention or other readmission agreements. For several days Maldonado sought, and was unable to secure, an appointment with the

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Minister of Interior in the hope that the authorities would delay the deportation, scheduled for Jan. 27. On Jan. 26 Embassy Skopje's DCM spoke with the Minister by phone. The Afghans were not deported on Jan. 27 as feared. The lawyers for the Afghans have filled a law suit on their behalf. Their cases are currently on appeal with the Administrative Court and there is no date for deportation.

5.(SBU)Maldonado believes that there are suitable ways to both guarantee the rights of asylum seekers by means of properly implementing the domestic legislation, and preserve the interest of the country. Last June at UNHCR's request, the Minister of Interior established a Working Group to analyze the situation of new asylum seekers, mainly Afghans coming from Greece. Maldonado advised that good recommendations came out of the Working Group as well a UNHCR/MoI meeting early this month. Currently UNHCR has no indication that the GoM has implemented the recommendations. Maldonado stated that he will continue to seek guarantees that the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, which was amended last year, is duly respected. (Embassy Skopje reporting)

UNHCR UPDATE ON DISPLACED PERSONS FROM KOSOVO - POLITICS STILL
HINDER RETURNS

6.(SBU)On Jan. 26 UNHCR Serbia and Kosovo briefed representatives from roughly 20 foreign missions in Belgrade on current status of return of displaced persons (DPs) to Kosovo. The total number of DPs who returned from Serbia to Kosovo in 2009 is 631, roughly double 2008's figure. However, last year's registration for return process coordinated by UNHCR and the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo resulted in only 184 persons out of 4,730 (1,212 cases consisting of individuals and families). The rest of 2009's returnees were either "spontaneous"--went on their own without help--or were individuals who had applied for assistance in previous years. UNHCR Serbia rep. Eduardo Arboleda attributed the low numbers in the 2009 exercise in part to increasing political tensions between Serbia and Kosovo and continuing reluctance of some Kosovo municipalities to accept returnees. UNHCR Mission Chief Herman

Stuurwold added that returnees face huge challenges to support themselves in Kosovo's current poor economic state. Stuurwold does not think that the Kosovo Government is investing enough in housing reconstruction and that it remains up to donors to provide much of the sustainability assistance. Despite the gloomy outlook UNHCR reports that currently some 1,565 individuals from the 2009 registration process remain willing to return and approximately 600 - 700 more people have expressed interest.

7.(SBU)In closing Arboleda advised that the Kosovo Ministry for Kosovo has given its views on UNHCR's proposal to act as the umbrella for the Kosovo Property Agency's (KPA) operations in Serbia. The holdup on final approval concerns text in documents KPA sends to property claimants. The Ministry stated that it can accept reference to GoK law, but not reference to Kosovo's constitution or national assembly. UNHCR has passed the comments to KPA in Pristina and is hoping to have a response to give back to the GoS with the next two weeks. UNHCR believes that restarting KPA operations in Serbia would help DPs in Serbia resolve property claims in Kosovo that have dragged on for years. Both UNHCR representatives urged the foreign mission representative to use their political influence on the governments of Serbia and Kosovo to find a way to work together to foster a better environment for those who still want to return to Kosovo.

MEDIA IN SERBIA

8.(U)Daily newspaper Vecernje Novosti reported that the Italian organization 'Inter SOS' is financing the construction of six houses for refugees and IDPs in Petrovac na Mlavi. The daily recalled that the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration previously contributed \$700,000 for the construction and furnishing of the apartments for refugees in Petrovac.

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COMINGS AND GOINGS

9.(SBU)

* Feb. 22-25: Refcoord in Geneva for Refugee Coordinators Workshop

* March 1-4: DAS David Robinson Visit to the Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia
WARLICK